

U.S. Department of Education
2013 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program
A Public School - 13PA7

School Type (Public Schools): **Charter** **Title 1** **Magnet** **Choice**
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Name of Principal: Mr. Joseph DeMar

Official School Name: Fort Couch Middle School

School Mailing Address: 515 Fort Couch Road
 Upper St. Clair, PA 15241-2099

County: Allegheny State School Code Number*: 103029203

Telephone: (412) 833-1600 E-mail: jdemar@uscsd.k12.pa.us

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I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I - Eligibility Certification), and certify that all information is accurate.

_____ Date _____
(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent*: Dr. Patrick O'Toole Ed.D. Superintendent e-mail: potoole@uscsd.k12.pa.us

District Name: Upper St. Clair School District District Phone: (412) 833-1600

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I - Eligibility Certification), and certify that it is accurate.

_____ Date _____
(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board President/Chairperson: Mrs. Barbara Bolas

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I - Eligibility Certification), and certify that to the best of my knowledge it is accurate.

_____ Date _____
(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

**Non-Public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and emailed to Aba Kumi, Director, National Blue Ribbon Schools (Aba.Kumi@ed.gov) or mailed by expedited mail or a courier mail service (such as Express Mail, FedEx or UPS) to Aba Kumi, Director, National Blue Ribbon Schools Program, Office of Communications and Outreach, U.S. Department of Education, 400 Maryland Ave., SW, Room 5E103, Washington, DC 20202-8173.

PART I - ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

The signatures on the first page of this application certify that each of the statements below concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) requirements is true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even K-12 schools, must apply as an entire school.)
2. The school has made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) or its equivalent each year for the past two years and has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
3. To meet final eligibility, the school must meet the state's AYP requirement or its equivalent in the 2012-2013 school year. Meeting AYP or its equivalent must be certified by the state. Any AYP status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum and a significant number of students in grades 7 and higher must take foreign language courses.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2007 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for that period.
6. The nominated school has not received the Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 or 2012.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

All data are the most recent year available.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district 3 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
2 Middle/Junior high schools
1 High schools
0 K-12 schools
6 Total schools in district
2. District per-pupil expenditure: 12349

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

3. Category that best describes the area where the school is located: Suburban
4. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 10
5. Number of students as of October 1, 2012 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	0	0	0
K	0	0	0
1	0	0	0
2	0	0	0
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
5	0	0	0
6	0	0	0
7	156	158	314
8	191	159	350
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12	0	0	0
Total in Applying School:			664

6. Racial/ethnic composition of the school: 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
11 % Asian
1 % Black or African American
1 % Hispanic or Latino
0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
86 % White
1 % Two or more races
100 % Total

Only the seven standard categories should be used in reporting the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.

7. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2011-2012 school year: 1%
This rate is calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Step	Description	Value
(1)	Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2011 until the end of the school year.	4
(2)	Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2011 until the end of the school year.	5
(3)	Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)].	9
(4)	Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2011	653
(5)	Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4).	0.01
(6)	Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100.	1

8. Percent of English Language Learners in the school: 1%
Total number of ELL students in the school: 8
Number of non-English languages represented: 6
Specify non-English languages:

The non-English speaking languages represented at Fort Couch are as follows: Farsi, Spanish, Italian, Telugi, Gujarati, and Japanese.

9. Percent of students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 3%

Total number of students who qualify: 39

If this method does not produce an accurate estimate of the percentage of students from low-income families, or the school does not participate in the free and reduced-priced school meals program, supply an accurate estimate and explain how the school calculated this estimate.

10. Percent of students receiving special education services: 14%

Total number of students served: 95

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional categories.

<u>15</u> Autism	<u>1</u> Orthopedic Impairment
<u>0</u> Deafness	<u>13</u> Other Health Impaired
<u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness	<u>49</u> Specific Learning Disability
<u>7</u> Emotional Disturbance	<u>8</u> Speech or Language Impairment
<u>0</u> Hearing Impairment	<u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury
<u>2</u> Mental Retardation	<u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness
<u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities	<u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed

11. Indicate number of full-time and part-time staff members in each of the categories below:

	<u>Full-Time</u>	<u>Part-Time</u>
Administrator(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>
Classroom teachers	<u>24</u>	<u>0</u>
Resource teachers/specialists (e.g., reading specialist, media specialist, art/music, PE teachers, etc.)	<u>21</u>	<u>4</u>
Paraprofessionals	<u>9</u>	<u>1</u>
Support staff (e.g., school secretaries, custodians, cafeteria aides, etc.)	<u>14</u>	<u>2</u>
Total number	<u>69</u>	<u>9</u>

12. Average school student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the Full Time Equivalent of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1: 28:1

13. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

	2011-2012	2010-2011	2009-2010	2008-2009	2007-2008
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	96%	97%	97%
High school graduation rate	%	%	%	%	%

14. **For schools ending in grade 12 (high schools):**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2012.

Graduating class size: _____

Enrolled in a 4-year college or university _____%

Enrolled in a community college _____%

Enrolled in vocational training _____%

Found employment _____%

Military service _____%

Other _____%

Total _____**0%**

15. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award:

☐ No

☒ Yes

If yes, what was the year of the award? 2001

PART III - SUMMARY

Upper St. Clair Township is a suburban community ten miles south of Pittsburgh, PA. The township consists primarily of residential property. The majority of the approximately 19,000 residents are Caucasian. Residents value education as reflected by the 70% of adults who hold at least a Bachelor's Degree. Students are reflective of the community in terms of their value for learning. The township is one of the ten best places to live in the United States as evidenced by the *U.S. News & World Report*, 2009.

The vision of Fort Couch Middle School and the Upper St. Clair School District is one that focuses on preparing students to be successful contributors to an ever-changing global society by providing a nurturing, engaging, and challenging learning environment. Developing lifelong learners and responsible citizens for a global society is the mission of the Upper St. Clair School District, which is served by a responsive and innovative staff who in partnership with the community provides learning experiences that nurture the uniqueness of each child and promote happiness and success.

In terms of milestones, Fort Couch Middle School has several of notable accomplishment. First, Fort Couch has been recognized three times as a National Blue Ribbon school. Most recently, this distinction was awarded during the 2001-2002 school year. Fort Couch is also a two-time recipient of the Don Eichhorn Schools to Watch Award (2008 and 2011). This award recognizes middle schools that serve as model schools in terms of academic excellence, social equity, developmental responsiveness, and organizational structure. An additional milestone of Fort Couch is its preeminent performance on the Pennsylvania State standardized assessments. The *Pittsburgh Business Time's* ranking of school districts in terms of performance on these assessments has placed Fort Couch Middle School number one for the past five years (2008-2012).

The traditions that have allowed Fort Couch to reach the above mentioned milestones are practices that have continually evolved to best meet students' needs. Fort Couch Middle School was one of the first middle schools established in the United States. Traditions that have been here since the onset of the middle school are interdisciplinary teaming, an advisory program, exploratory program, and a unique grade reporting model. The interdisciplinary teaming approach has all students placed on a team of four teachers. The team consists of a science, social studies, math, and language arts teacher. Within the team, students take part in an advisory program. The advisory program provides students with an opportunity to engage in routine small group gatherings with a teacher who serves as their advisor. Advisor time is a scheduled opportunity for students to build meaningful relationships with their advisor which helps to facilitate discussions that help to address students' social, emotional, and academic needs. Along with the advisory program Fort Couch institutes an exploratory program that has students participating in a rotation of courses throughout the year that go beyond the core team classes. All students are exposed to art, music, technology education, family and consumer sciences, and Twenty-First Century technology. The last tradition that separates Fort Couch from other middle schools is its report card which does not offer traditional letter grades. Instead, the report card reports to parents and students the students' performance on formative assessments, summative assessments, and skill progression in their respective subjects. Consequently, students receive an overall qualifier for each class that places an emphasis on their growth throughout the grading period.

Like the traditions of Fort Couch, there are also many other practices that represent strengths of the school. One practice that is invaluable to the organization is the curriculum leader model. In this model all curricular areas have a curriculum leader. The curriculum leader is a teacher who serves as the content expert for the middle school. The curriculum leader meets monthly with their department members and then with the middle school leadership team. The leadership team consists of administrators and other middle level curriculum leaders. All curricular areas are reviewed biannually for curriculum changes. As a result of the curriculum leader model, many curricular and instructional practices have been born. Such

practices are students having the choice of participating in an International Baccalaureate Program, reading instruction that employs a heavily differentiated multi-text approach in all reading classes, math courses that range from remedial to two years accelerated beyond the normal curricular progression, a foreign language program that prepares all students to enter high school with the equivalent of completing the first year of a language prior to high school, and an inquiry based science curriculum that employs a spiraling approach so that students receive annual instruction in multiple strands of science. Additional strengths of the school are the professional learning community structure, teaching guidance counselors, and a highly participated in extracurricular and co-curricular program.

PART IV - INDICATORS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

1. Assessment Results:

Part A

Fort Couch Middle School holds high standards relative to student performance on standardized assessments. Students are assessed in seventh and eighth grade in the areas of reading and mathematics. Based on the Pennsylvania State System for Assessment, students can score in four possible ranges: advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic. Over the past five years, students of Fort Couch Middle School have shown high overall proficiency scores. Proficiency scores refer to students scoring in the proficient or advanced range. The expectation at Fort Couch Middle School is that all students earn a proficiency score.

In terms of mathematics, the average proficiency score over the past five years is 95%. More specifically, 83% of the students were in the advanced range and 12% in the proficient range. With regard to performance in reading, the average proficiency score over the past five years is also 95%. Of the 95% average, 78% of the students scored in the advanced range and 17% of the students scored in the proficient range.

Part B

Overall student performance with respect to standardized assessments has been relatively consistent at Fort Couch Middle School for the past five years. Performance trends indicate that the student population as a whole reflect consistent evidence of high achievement at Fort Couch. Mentioned above, are the five-year averages for reading and mathematics. To be more specific, individual grade level averages over the past five years are as follows: grade seven reading 94%, grade seven mathematics 96%, grade eight mathematics 95%, and grade eight reading 98%. Subgroup performance has been comparable to overall student population data. However, in terms of the most significant gains, the free and reduced lunch/socioeconomic disadvantaged subgroup has demonstrated the most growth over the past five years. In the area of seventh grade mathematics, the overall proficiency score has grown from 67% in 2007-2008 to 94% in 2011-2012. With regard to eighth grade mathematics, the overall proficiency score has grown from 71% in 2007-2008 to 100% in 2011-2012. Similar growth has occurred for this subgroup in the area of reading. In terms of seventh grade reading, the overall proficiency score has increased from 67% in 2007-2008 to 87% in 2011-2012. Eighth grade reading has also grown substantially as well, as the overall proficiency score was 79% in 2007-2008 and 93% in 2011-2012.

In addition to the overall student performance over the past five years, all subgroups have performed at a high level as well. The majority of students within all subgroups and overall student population routinely score in the advanced range. There are several practices that can be attributed to such success. One of those practices is our curriculum leader model. All content areas have a teacher who serves as the content expert. In addition to the high level of collaboration that occurs within each of the respective departments as a result of this model, all curricular areas are reviewed annually. That is, curricular changes occur each year based on students' needs. Another practice that heavily contributes to student achievement is the district's extensive professional development program. The focal points of the professional development program for Fort Couch staff has been assessment, differentiation of instruction, and curriculum development via Understanding By Design. These three pillars have contributed greatly to teachers using formative assessment to drive subsequent instruction. Ultimately, all lessons are highly differentiated based on students' needs.

For the 2011-2012 school year, the seventh grade special education reading subgroup had an overall proficiency score of 69%. Such a proficiency score reflects a gap of 25% between this subgroup and the

overall seventh grade student population with respect to reading. The same subgroup also has a gap of 20% in the area of mathematics. To address the gaps in both disciplines, the following practices have been implemented or modified:

Mathematics – The 2011-2012 school year was the first time second chance learning opportunities (math mastery) were formally scheduled into the student day. These second chance learning opportunities occurred during the last period of the school day, which is a resource period. Student placement in math mastery is based on daily performance on formative assessments. Because of requirements for our special education students to meet daily during this time with their case managers, they were unable to participate in these second chance learning opportunities. As a result of this scheduling conflict, the master schedule has been changed starting in the 2012-2013 school year. The change incorporates an additional resource period each day during the middle of the student day. All students, including special education students, may now participate daily in the Fort Couch math mastery program when the need arises.

Reading - Beginning in the 2012-2013 school year, reading instruction has become highly differentiated at Fort Couch. Within all reading classrooms, multiple leveled texts are being utilized simultaneously. Additionally, because of the additional resource period built into each day, the reading specialist is scheduled routinely with special education students who have demonstrated specific reading deficiencies.

Scheduling changes in both the areas of reading and mathematics now allow students to receive more support and intensive instruction. More importantly, both changes allow for timely and consistent interventions to the students.

2. Using Assessment Results:

Student performance on assessments is what drives instructional practices at Fort Couch Middle School. That is, teachers intentionally design daily lessons based on students' performance on formative and summative assessments. Such assessments encompass primarily localized data; however, performance on state and national exams are also considered. Various systems and practices are established to allow teachers to thoroughly dissect the wealth of student data that exists.

All teachers at Fort Couch Middle School have access to a database called OnHands. OnHands provides teachers the opportunity to view longitudinal student data relative to their performance on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). These are standardized assessments given to students in the areas of mathematics, science, reading, and writing. Through OnHands teachers have the ability to customize reports. For instance, teachers routinely examine student progress with regard to specific assessment anchors. OnHands also affords teachers the ability to dissect student performance on Terra-Nova assessments. Terra-Nova exams differ in comparison to the PSSAs in that they are nationally normed assessments.

With regard to local assessments, teachers at Fort Couch Middle School administer common quarterly assessments to their students. These are summative assessments given in the areas of mathematics, reading, writing, science, and social studies. The assessments focus on both skills and content. In addition to the quarterly summative assessments, teachers rely heavily on formative data to drive their daily instruction. To facilitate the dialogue and analysis of student performance relative to these sets of data, Fort Couch Middle School employs a Professional Learning Community (PLC). All teachers engage in PLC's weekly. During these community meetings, teachers adhere to a format that has them reviewing results of student performance on their formative and summative assessments. The PLC gathering enables teachers to review such results with colleagues who teach the same grade level and subject as them. To help teachers design subsequent instruction based on the findings of these collaborative gatherings, teachers then engage in a second PLC. The second PLC has teachers collaborating with other teachers on their team. In this PLC, team teachers discuss the students they share in class but teach in different subjects. While the goal of the first PLC is to examine assessment results, the focus of the second PLC is

to discuss individual student needs. The two-prong approach to the PLC model enhances teachers' ability to effectively design instruction, as they are given weekly opportunities to examine both assessment results and the potential factors that influence those results.

The preceding paragraph broadly addresses how Fort Couch teachers utilize assessment results to drive instruction. To help provide more concrete examples, we will describe practices in both the areas of reading and mathematics. With respect to reading, all students at Fort Couch have their reading comprehension benchmarked and progress monitored. Data from these exams reveals students' comprehension of literal, inferential, and evaluative text. The results of the progress monitoring system allow teachers to more efficiently differentiate instruction based on students' readiness levels. Such results have influenced school-wide curricular changes that promote more exposure to activities that foster students' ability to comprehend text in a more critical manner.

In the area of mathematics, all students at Fort Couch take a pretest at the beginning of each unit of instruction. Students' pretest scores and rate of acquisition levels determine their placement for that unit. Students who demonstrate the need for enrichment services will receive instruction for the entire unit via the math resource teacher. On the contrary, students who demonstrate difficulty mastering content via formative assessments throughout the unit will participate in an additional instruction period called Math Mastery. Math Mastery provides daily interventions to students who present the need. To prevent students from missing other classes, such instruction occurs during a non-academic period that was incorporated into the Fort Couch master schedule.

In terms of communicating standardized test data, all parents receive annual individual notification and analysis of their child's performance. The Fort Couch administration hosts several informational sessions to share and discuss results with parents and community members. Such discussions occur through the following mediums: parent move-up night, PTA meetings, and community open microphone sessions. Student performance relative to internal formative and summative assessments is shared through a unique but highly effective system. Along with assessments, student report cards share student data by dividing student performance into three primary categories: formative assessments, summative assessments, and skills specific to each subject area. Such a model allows teachers to thoroughly share with parents and students a comprehensive overview of student performance and growth.

3. Sharing Lessons Learned:

Fort Couch Middle School continuously shares successful practices and lessons learned with other state and professional organizations. Specifically, Fort Couch staff and administration are annual presenters at the Pennsylvania Association of Middle Level Education (PAMLE) conference, participate in the South Hills Area School District Association (SHASDA), and are members of the National Schools to Watch. Additionally, Fort Couch routinely hosts visitors from other school districts, and Fort Couch staff and administration frequently provide professional development to educational institutions at local, state, and national venues.

Fort Couch staff and administration have presented at the PAMLE annual conference for five consecutive years. Topics of presentations include but are not limited to developmental responsiveness in the middle school, components of an effective middle school, essentials in interdisciplinary teaming, and sound assessment practices. With regard to sharing on a local level, Fort Couch is an active member of SHASDA. Sharing of practices at SHASDA mirrors the delivery and sharing provided at PAMLE. SHASDA encourages teachers and administrators who meet monthly to share and collaborate on best practices. Fort Couch has presented formally on scheduling to maximize staff while continuing to meet students' needs, reporting student growth to parents via a unique report card model, and to have guidance counselors effectively teaching students. Furthermore, being recognized as a national two-time Schools to Watch recipient requires Fort Couch administration to evaluate and provide feedback to other middle schools throughout the state with respect to the Schools to Watch criteria that includes academic excellence, social equity, developmental responsiveness, and organizational structures.

As a result of the sharing previously described, several school districts have visited Fort Couch to engage in dialogue that further extends the learning that was initially introduced via one of the formal venues listed above. Within the past three years, school districts such as North Hills, Seneca Valley, Montour, Shaler, and West Mifflin, have visited Fort Couch. One example would be the recent visit from the West Mifflin School District. After receiving detailed exposure to Fort Couch's scheduling, staffing, and essential middle level concepts, West Mifflin School District was able to efficiently transition to a "true" middle school by incorporating teaming. Ongoing consultation was also provided. While the focus of each visit varied greatly, each of the visits were requested to allow for additional exposure and understanding of practices, programs, or structures that have enabled Fort Couch to be a high performing middle school.

4. Engaging Families and Communities:

At Fort Couch, there is a strong relationship between the school staff and the community of families who live in our district. There are many ways for community members to be involved at our school, and it is our experience that as a result, they feel that they are a welcomed and valued aspect of what makes Fort Couch great. Some of the strategies that have been implemented contributing to student success and school improvement include the creation of a strong Parent-Teacher-Association (PTA), the offering of bi-annual events (Open House and Spring Exhibit) allowing community members to visit our school and also regular parent-teacher conferences.

Our PTA is one of the most successful methods of communication between community members and the school. The PTA is comprised of representatives from the Upper St. Clair community who attend monthly meetings in our building, because they have students in our school. Our administrative staff attends these meetings and answers whatever questions may come about. Additionally, our administrative staff updates parents about things happening around school. The PTA collaborates with us to put on annual events such as "Caught You Being Good" and "Reach Out." The PTA also sponsors the creation of the yearbook and multiple school "socials" throughout the year. During school "socials," also known as dances, PTA parents help to chaperone. By being so actively involved in meetings and school functions, parents of our students are engaged and aware of things happening in and around our school.

Twice yearly our school opens its doors to highlight the accomplishments and performances of our students. During Open House and Spring Exhibit, the school is open for parents to come in, visit with teachers, hear about what is being taught and accomplished. During these visits, parents are also permitted to tour the school and see various student projects displayed. These events allow community members not only to mix and mingle with school staff, it also affords them an inside view of what happens during our school day.

Another way our parents are involved with our school is through parent-teacher conferences. A parent can request a parent-teacher conference any time that they would like. Teachers at our school meet as a team, with all four core academic teachers and the grade-level counselor. During these meetings, parents are given a snap shot of how their child is doing in each of their classes. It also gives parents a chance to ask whatever questions they might have. Parents of our students feel welcomed to come in if a desire presents itself. In addition to these face-to-face conferences, teachers, counselors and administrators make themselves available via email and phone, on a very regular basis and as busy as they may be, they respond to all inquiries within 24 hours.

In sum, the connection between Fort Couch and the community is a strong one. Community members and parents of students feel comfortable communicating with school staff and if they should so desire, there are many opportunities for parents to be involved in school-sanctioned events. There is no question that we have the support of our community members and in turn for their support, we continuously allow them to be involved with our school and to take pride in our successes.

PART V - CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Curriculum:

The foundation of any successful school is a rigorous and engaging curriculum. In the Upper St. Clair School District, the curriculum design process is unique and allows for a collaborative, thorough and continual evaluation of the objectives taught to students. A curriculum leader, who is also a teacher in that department area, heads each of the curricular areas. The job of the curriculum leader is to ensure the curriculum is aligned with local, state and national standards as well as to evaluate the needs of the department on an on-going basis. This process allows the curriculum to be responsive to changes in standards as well in students. At Ft. Couch Middle School, the curriculum adheres closely to the Pennsylvania State objectives and the National Common Core initiative.

Teaming is the foundation of Fort Couch Middle School. All students are assigned to one of the six analytical teams. All teams are composed of a science, math, social studies, and language arts teacher. In addition to these core classes, students will have a foreign language, expressive arts, guidance as a class, and physical education class. Students will also take part in the advisory program. Each of these components are integrated into a unique six-day cyclical schedule.

The social studies program at Fort Couch takes an integrated look at American History. The integrated approach, a model supported by the National Council of Social Studies (NCSS), weaves together all the different disciplines in Social Studies: Economics, Geography, History, Sociology and Civics. This integrated style of teaching social studies, allows for a greater and more broad-based understanding of how unrelated disciplines of Social Studies fit together while meeting the guidelines of the Pennsylvania standards.

Fort Couch Students learn science through the use of hands-on-activities, in classroom labs, outdoor field experiences, in science related computer applications, and in a wide variety of multi-media materials. Units range from light and genetics to chemistry and oceanography.

Our math curriculum is structured so that students can progress via enrichment or remediation. Multiple course selections include the general 7th and 8th grade math curricula and one to two year acceleration options based on student need and data.

The Language Arts curriculum is language rich and integrates language arts in the total educational program of our students. The language program includes instruction in reading skills, process writing, literature, spelling, language structure, and oral communications. Reading instruction provides students with extensive work in fiction and nonfiction pieces.

The expressive arts model is a seven-week rotation including art, music, family and consumer science, industrial arts, and a 21st century course. As a result of the fast paced changes in technology, a curriculum for 21st century technology skills was developed and implemented for the 2012-2013 school year. The curriculum was developed using NETS (National Educational Technology Standards) in conjunction with ISTE (International Society for Technology Education).

An additional unique component to the Fort Couch curricula is the World Language model. Students have the opportunity to continue with their language selection from 6th grade through 7th and 8th grade. This allows students to have one year of language completed when entering their ninth grade year. Students may participate in Spanish, German, or French.

In an effort to offer selections that encompass the whole child, band, chorus, and orchestra are available for all students to participate in throughout the school day. Students do not have to choose only one offering due to the nature of the schools daily rotating schedule.

All curricula areas are unique based on the ongoing differentiated opportunities available to all students throughout the school day.

2. Reading/English:

Fort Couch Middle School's English language arts (ELA) curriculum is centered on the strands of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. These strands are integrated in instruction as students prepare to become more effective communicators. Each strand is taught with continuous progress and mastery learning approaches. Students are taught beginning with their current learning needs as they move on their journey toward excellence.

Reading instruction includes reading comprehension instruction as well as literary elements and analysis instruction. Reading comprehension is a critical area of instruction for middle school students. Because of this, students are taught using a leveled text approach. Multi-leveled texts allow students to access the texts within their zones of proximal development to increase reading ability. Instruction is then scaffolded to enable students to move to increasingly more difficult texts and analysis.

Writing instruction encompasses the teaching of the writing process along with training in grammatical elements. Students are coached through the stages of prewriting, drafting, editing, revising, and publishing as they write in a variety of modes. The writing curriculum is spiraled with a focus on narrative, expository, persuasive, and research-based writing so that students see the connections among writing styles. Foundational grammar skills are reviewed and built upon as students work on writing in more sophisticated styles and with more complex sentence structures.

The speaking and listening components of the curriculum are designed to assist students in learning how to listen critically and respond appropriately, including understanding a speaker's purpose and bias and clearly and tactfully presenting opinions that connect to or refute a speaker's point. The goal of this strand is to train students to contribute thoughtfully and clearly in society.

The ELA curriculum is also supported in the Expressive Arts, Special Education Program, Gifted Program, and content area classrooms. Teachers in these areas work seamlessly with the ELA teachers in planning and providing instructional support. This collaboration is especially helpful in allowing for differentiation and meeting all students' needs.

3. Mathematics:

The math department at Fort Couch operates under the three foundational principles of continuous progress, mastery learning, and differentiation. Teachers in all classes differentiate instruction and assessment to meet the current needs of each student. Such differentiation ensures that all students, regardless of their mathematical ability, continue to grow and learn new concepts.

The majority of students in seventh grade take pre-algebra, and the majority of students in eighth grade take algebra. Teachers in these classes employ a blend of constructivist and traditional teaching practices to introduce students to new concepts and to reinforce procedures that allow for easy application of these concepts. For those students who struggle with the concepts of pre-algebra, there is an opportunity for them to take algebra over a two-year period commencing in eighth grade and concluding at the high school. This small group of students utilizes Carnegie Learning's Cognitive Tutor Program to build a deeper understanding of algebra that better enables them for success in higher-level math classes.

To customize a learning path for stronger math students, the math department at Fort Couch offers opportunities for both acceleration and enrichment. At the end of their sixth grade year, all students are given an assessment over the material to be taught in pre-algebra. Those students who demonstrate mastery of those objectives are placed in algebra in seventh grade and take geometry as eighth graders. For those students who do not accelerate, enrichment options are offered on a unit-by-unit basis. At the beginning of each unit, students are given a pre-assessment that covers forthcoming concepts. If students demonstrate proficient knowledge of the learning to be explored next, they are offered project-based enrichment activities that drive their understanding of those topics even further. Teachers can also offer enrichment activities for individual objectives at their discretion.

To ensure mastery for all students regardless of the class they are taking, time is built into the daily schedule for math teachers to provide second chance learning opportunities to those students for whom they deem it necessary. The teacher can assign students to a “math mastery” period based on data or observations of each student’s work in class. The math resource teacher is utilized to meet the needs of those students who may require more intense and ongoing interventions. These practices and programs work in concert to confirm that all students grow in their mathematical ability and are well equipped for the next phase of their mathematical studies.

4. Additional Curriculum Area:

Today’s students face unique challenges in our changing global society. In science the need to address such challenges has become more imperative than ever before. At Fort Couch Middle School, the science curriculum focuses on essential skills that address the challenges of the 21st century student: communication, problem solving, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. These skills empower students to be prepared for an evolving world.

At Fort Couch students are not only expected to learn science, but they are also expected to act and think like a scientist. The science program strives to stimulate and foster student interest and excitement for a subject that has become part of daily living in an expanding technological society. All seventh grade science students, for example, participate in an e-mission from the Challenger Space Center at Jesuit College in West Virginia. During the mission each student saves the residents of Montserrat by tracking a hurricane, monitoring a volcano, and making appropriate evacuations on the island. This problem-solving challenge requires students to utilize process and critical thinking skills while collaborating and communicating with their peers. As a result, the partnerships with the local and global community empower students to become lifelong learners while understanding that they are part of a global society.

Each child at Fort Couch possesses unique qualities, so customizing learning is a vital aspect of each educator’s instruction. The science department particularly sets high standards for all of the students while recognizing that each individual needs to be nurtured and engaged to allow for success and growth. One way the teachers are able to customize learning is by incorporating student-centered labs and topic and project choices based on the interests and abilities of the students. Blended Schools, for instance, is a tool that encourages student expression, allows the individualization of student assignments, and nurtures different rates of learning. Each student is assessed on content, skill and process, nonfiction reading, and inquiry in each unit. Reading and writing are also integrated so that the students understand the importance of communication. Each year of the science program features four distinct topics, and each year includes a unit on life, earth, and physics.

The Upper St. Clair Middle School Science Program, which is ranked first in the state on PSSA science test scores, allows students to explore the impact science has on the world while preparing them for the 21st century.

5. Instructional Methods:

Instructional practices at Fort Couch Middle School are a clear strength of the school. Fort Couch has made an extensive commitment to its professional development in the areas of assessment, differentiation of instruction, and use of technology to enhance students' learning. Instruction at Fort Couch is driven by formative data. This belief is reflected on the students' report cards which report the students' performance on formative assessments, summative assessments, and skill progression in each of their respective subjects. Moreover, students receive an overall qualifier for each class that places an emphasis on their growth throughout the grading period.

Two clear examples of Fort Couch's commitment to differentiated instruction would be in the areas of reading and mathematics. In terms of reading, every student in the school takes a benchmark reading assessment at the onset, middle, and end of the school year. The results of these assessments, coupled with standardized test data and formative classroom data, determine students' instructional reading levels. Subsequently, students receive reading instruction in a heterogeneously grouped setting via a multi-text approach. Such texts are aligned based on reading levels and interests. With regard to mathematics, all students take a pretest at the beginning of each unit of instruction. If students demonstrate mastery on the pretest, or have shown a high rate of acquisition, they will receive enrichment instruction for that entire unit via the math resource teacher. Students who demonstrate the need for intensive interventions lie at the opposite end of the spectrum. These students will have daily opportunities to receive additional instruction through Fort Couch's math mastery program. Math mastery is scheduled daily during a non-academic period. Students' placement is determined daily based on formative assessments and students' desire to receive additional instruction.

Technology is infused on all interdisciplinary teams at Fort Couch. Each team, for example, has a set of student laptops, access to four computer labs, and in some instances, the use of iPads, a new one-to-one initiative. This technology has been instrumental in allowing teachers to more efficiently collect formative data on students. In addition, such access allows for teachers to then design instruction based on students' needs and learning styles. Lastly, summative assessments are becoming more authentic. Rather than traditional unit exams, students are using technology to do presentations, create movies and portfolios, a strategy that ultimately affords students more choice in how they represent their learning.

6. Professional Development:

The professional development approach of Fort Couch and the USC School District encompass a threefold mission: to serve the whole child, to customize instruction, and to prepare instruction for the 21st Century learner.

All sessions for the past four years have been planned around these critical areas. The concept of customizing learning has been the umbrella for each session that takes into consideration the individual strengths and needs of the whole child by providing instruction in twenty-first century skills through new and effective delivery strategies.

Teachers are required to complete 12 hours of professional development that are related to their individual needs. A catalog of summer options are created to provide choices matched to teachers needs in terms of the content that they teach and their level of expertise in areas of focus. Teachers can also propose individual projects. The completion of this new learning is a part of the supervision and evaluation process. This is in addition to the scheduled formal professional development days that occur throughout the year.

A professional development focus for the school and district is chosen each year based on the mission described above and District's goals that relate to global knowledge, thinking and learning, the whole child and leveraging appropriate technologies.

Essential questions continue to be used when planning professional development sessions that connect to our academic standards. These questions aim at improving student achievement e.g., How do we deliver instruction in ways that maximize individual student growth and meet individual student needs? In what ways can technological innovations help us to customize instruction? What are we already doing that can help us in our efforts to customize instruction? How do we use formative and summative assessment data to customize learning? How do we ensure an emphasis on conceptual understanding for our students?

Professional development is reviewed annually through a staff survey to ensure that we continue to meet the needs of the teachers and students. As we move forward to future professional development it will include a transition to the common core standards and curriculum mapping.

7. School Leadership:

At Fort Couch Middle School, our 2012 theme is “Choosing to be Great.” A theme is established yearly at Fort Couch in order to have a common connection with the students and staff, thus setting a tone for the year. The leadership philosophy of the school is built on professionalism and student success. Fort Couch has had the privilege to hire 80% of its current teaching staff in the building. As a result, professional people have been hired to achieve professional results as demonstrated in our ongoing academic success.

As of March, 2012, a revision in the building leadership model occurred at Fort Couch. The administrative team that was assembled follows a unique model that includes a head principal, a shared assistant principal for grades 5-8, and a newly created academic principal for grades 5-8. The purpose of this 5-8 model is to provide consistency for students and academics within the middle school model of the Upper St. Clair School District. This “tripod” model allows the administrative team to support each other and divide responsibilities based on skillsets. District leadership professional development has focused on the implementation from readings of Miller, Coter, Rath, and Schwann.

Additionally, curriculum leaders play a crucial role within the structure of the school. Curriculum leaders are teachers who have been identified as content experts within the school who perform a quasi-administrative role in order to enhance a curriculum that is continually refined.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) allow building leaders to keep a pulse on curricular programs and student needs while empowering teacher decision-making and leadership. Two types of PLCs are held within the building. One is a team PLC to discuss student needs, and the other is a department PLC to maintain grade level curricula alignment. Administrators attend meetings and review and respond to PLC minutes through the use of Google Drive.

The district tagline is customizing learning, nurturing potential, and delivering excellence. In order to realize this tagline, the building schedule is reviewed annually. This review resulted in a restructuring to include a math mastery component, allowing the math teacher to customize learning for all students. Math mastery is a second chance learning opportunity for students that is data driven and takes place in the middle of the day, creating an opportunity where other students can receive ongoing reading instruction and one choice day for clubs based on student selection. Structural changes such as this one requires leadership to be student-centered, progressive, and one that is collaborative.

PART VII - ASSESSMENT RESULTS

STATE CRITERION-REFERENCED TESTS

Subject: Mathematics

Grade: 7

Test: PSSA

Edition/Publication Year: 2011-2012

Publisher: Data Recognition Corp

	2011-2012	2010-2011	2009-2010	2008-2009	2007-2008
Testing Month	Apr	Apr	Mar	Mar	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES					
Advanced & Proficient	97	97	96	98	94
Advanced	85	87	82	82	75
Number of students tested	341	296	310	325	320
Percent of total students tested	100	100	100	100	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	3	5	1	6	1
Percent of students alternatively assessed		2		2	
SUBGROUP SCORES					
1. Free/Reduced-Price Meals/Socio-economic Disadvantaged Students					
Advanced & Proficient	94	100	94	100	Masked
Advanced	81	81	71	73	Masked
Number of students tested	16	16	17	11	6
2. African American Students					
Advanced & Proficient	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Advanced	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Number of students tested	3	5	5	2	3
3. Hispanic or Latino Students					
Advanced & Proficient	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Advanced	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Number of students tested	6	4	4	1	2
4. Special Education Students					
Advanced & Proficient	77	88	80	88	73
Advanced	39	55	55	42	42
Number of students tested	39	33	51	42	41
5. English Language Learner Students					
Advanced & Proficient	0	Masked	Masked	Masked	0
Advanced	0	Masked	Masked	Masked	0
Number of students tested		6	3	2	
6. Asian/Pacific Islander					
Advanced & Proficient	100	96	100	100	100
Advanced	94	89	100	93	96
Number of students tested	36	28	27	27	27
NOTES:					
Masked indicates data were not made public because fewer than 10 students were tested.					

STATE CRITERION-REFERENCED TESTS

Subject: Reading

Grade: 7

Test: PSSA

Edition/Publication Year: 2011-2012

Publisher: Data Recognition Corp

	2011-2012	2010-2011	2009-2010	2008-2009	2007-2008
Testing Month	Apr	Apr	Mar	Mar	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES					
Advanced/Proficient	94	96	92	94	93
Advanced	66	69	71	75	65
Number of students tested	341	296	310	325	320
Percent of total students tested	100	100	100	100	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	3	5	1	6	1
Percent of students alternatively assessed	0	2	0	2	0
SUBGROUP SCORES					
1. Free/Reduced-Price Meals/Socio-economic Disadvantaged Students					
Advanced/Proficient	87	94	65	92	Masked
Advanced	56	56	41	46	Masked
Number of students tested	16	16	17	11	6
2. African American Students					
Advanced/Proficient	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Advanced	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Number of students tested	3	5	5	2	3
3. Hispanic or Latino Students					
Advanced/Proficient	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Advanced	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Number of students tested	6	4	4	1	2
4. Special Education Students					
Advanced/Proficient	69	88	74	78	76
Advanced	28	33	35	29	42
Number of students tested	39	33	51	42	41
5. English Language Learner Students					
Advanced/Proficient	0	Masked	Masked	Masked	0
Advanced	0	Masked	Masked	Masked	0
Number of students tested		6	3	2	
6. Asian/Pacific Islander					
Advanced/Proficient	97	97	96	89	100
Advanced	83	79	85	70	82
Number of students tested	36	28	27	27	27
NOTES:					
Masked indicates data were not made public because fewer than 10 students were tested.					

13PA7

STATE CRITERION-REFERENCED TESTS

Subject: Mathematics

Grade: 8

Test: PSSA

Edition/Publication Year: 2011-2012

Publisher: Data Recognition Corp

	2011-2012	2010-2011	2009-2010	2008-2009	2007-2008
Testing Month	Apr	Apr	Mar	Mar	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES					
Advanced/Proficient	98	95	96	93	93
Advanced	89	80	86	84	82
Number of students tested	303	323	335	334	343
Percent of total students tested	100	100	100	100	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	5	2	2	1	6
Percent of students alternatively assessed	2				2
SUBGROUP SCORES					
1. Free/Reduced-Price Meals/Socio-economic Disadvantaged Students					
Advanced/Proficient	100	92	77	Masked	71
Advanced	87	62	69	Masked	36
Number of students tested	15	26	13	8	14
2. African American Students					
Advanced/Proficient	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Advanced	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Number of students tested	4	5	4	3	6
3. Hispanic or Latino Students					
Advanced/Proficient	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Advanced	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Number of students tested	4	4	1	1	3
4. Special Education Students					
Advanced/Proficient	91	78	74	58	62
Advanced	61	44	40	40	34
Number of students tested	33	47	41	45	54
5. English Language Learner Students					
Advanced/Proficient	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	0
Advanced	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	0
Number of students tested	4	7	2	2	
6. Asian/Pacific Islander					
Advanced/Proficient	100	100	100	100	100
Advanced	93	97	96	97	100
Number of students tested	28	30	27	31	21
NOTES:					
Masked indicates data were not made public because fewer than 10 students were tested.					

13PA7

STATE CRITERION-REFERENCED TESTS

Subject: Reading

Grade: 8

Test: PSSA

Edition/Publication Year: 2011-2012

Publisher: Data Recognition Corp

	2011-2012	2010-2011	2009-2010	2008-2009	2007-2008
Testing Month	Apr	Apr	Mar	Mar	Apr
SCHOOL SCORES					
Advanced/Proficient	98	97	99	97	97
Advanced	86	89	89	87	87
Number of students tested	303	323	335	334	343
Percent of total students tested	100	100	100	100	100
Number of students alternatively assessed	5	2	2	1	6
Percent of students alternatively assessed	2				2
SUBGROUP SCORES					
1. Free/Reduced-Price Meals/Socio-economic Disadvantaged Students					
Advanced/Proficient	93	92	100	Masked	79
Advanced	80	77	85	Masked	64
Number of students tested	15	26	13	8	14
2. African American Students					
Advanced/Proficient	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Advanced	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Number of students tested	4	5	4	3	6
3. Hispanic or Latino Students					
Advanced/Proficient	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Advanced	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked
Number of students tested	4	4	1	1	3
4. Special Education Students					
Advanced/Proficient	94	80	92	80	81
Advanced	55	59	58	51	42
Number of students tested	33	47	41	45	54
5. English Language Learner Students					
Advanced/Proficient	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	0
Advanced	Masked	Masked	Masked	Masked	0
Number of students tested	4	7	2	2	
6. Asian/Pacific Islander					
Advanced/Proficient	100	97	96	97	100
Advanced	96	90	89	97	100
Number of students tested	28	30	27	31	21
NOTES:					
Masked indicates data were not made public because fewer than 10 students were tested.					

13PA7